

CHAPTER V

THE LEGEND

Lone squaw was left at settler's door,
Six days she lived, and breathed no more.
Was it from wound, or grief she bore?
They laid her there far from tepees,
On bluff high above the trees.
They died for us, those poor Pawnees.

As the summer of 1873 progressed, 350 Pawnee Indians prepared to leave the reservation at Genoa, Nebraska, on their annual buffalo hunt up the Republican Valley.²²⁵ John Williamson had just been newly appointed trail agent and would ride with them. At 23 years of age, this was a new experience for him. Having arrived in the state two years earlier, he had recently moved to the Pawnee Agency where he was employed as an agency farmer. "I did not apply for the place and was surprised when one of the chiefs came . . . and informed me that they had decided to request the government to appoint me to accompany them.²²⁶ L.B.Platt, of Baltimore, was also to join them. It would be an adventure neither of them would forget.

They left the reservation on July 3rd, and during the month that followed, hunted along the Beaver Creek. At some point, they established a camp a half mile from B.F.Bradbury's home and trading post, where they stayed for three days. Years later, Bradbury's daughter, Lola, recalled their first visit to his store.

As mother appeared at the door she was saluted with "Where is your Indian?" Mother understood that he had reference to father so she replied, "A short distance from the house Do you want to see him?" Their conversation ran as follows: "No, I want some bread." "Do you want to buy it." "Yes." Mother went into the house and returned with a loaf of bread which she told him he could have for 10 cents. Said he, "Give it to me." to which she replied, "No, I won't. You told me you wanted to buy it and that is all the way you can get it." "Give it to me," he repeated with emphasis. She left him and went into the house. ²²⁷

With this he left, but returned shortly after with a number of others. By this time though, Bradbury was there to greet them himself. "They came into the house, looked around, and then took a general survey around the house. That which seemed to attract their attention more than anything else was a new grindstone." It was not long before "scores of Indians came to sharpen their knives for dressing buffalo," which Bradbury allowed until he saw that the crank shaft was about worn out and told them to leave. ²²⁸

He didn't have any more trouble with the Indians until the third day. One of the men he came to know as "Bluffer," because of dealings with the grindstone, brought a riding bridle in to trade for groceries. Bradbury offered him seventy five cents for it and he accepted, but the Indian wanted coffee, sugar, flour and ammunition among other things.

He wanted so many different things that each parcel, of course, would be small. Father commenced weighing out the different articles for him and each time he would see the scales balance he would say, "little more, little more." Brother sat watching the whole transaction with not a very amiable feeling toward the Indian. Finally he remarked, "If he can't be satisfied I would tell him to take his bridle and go. These words were hardly said when the Indian put his whip to brother's mouth as much as to say, "Keep your mouth shut." Charlie took hold of the whip, then the Indian dropped it, drew his bow and reached for an arrow. Then brother took hold of both his arms and held him. Father stepped up between them and said, "No more of this." The Indian replied, "All right, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go to camp and get my chief and a heap of Indians and come back" "All right," said father, "I would like to see your chief." When he saw he could not bluff father, he calmed down, accepted what had been weighed out for him, and seemed satisfied with the trade.²²⁹

As he left the store, he shook hands with everyone except Charlie, with whom he'd had the tussel, and turning the Mrs. Bradbury said, "I don't like your boy. I have been here heap days, heap talk. I don't like him."²³⁰

From here, the Indians traveled to the northwest and on August 4th, reached the north bank of the Republican, 10 miles west of Culbertson, on the present site of Trenton. At this point, three white men found them to report "that a large band of Sioux had been camped 25 miles northwest for several days waiting for an opportunity to attack the Pawnees."²³¹

According to Paul Riley, who extensively researched the Pawnee-Sioux battle, this was where John Williamson failed as trail agent.

In a conflict between boyish egotism and his empowered duties, egotism won. His letters of instruction . . . had been clear. If the possibilities of trouble with other Indians arose, Williamson had the authority to compel the Pawnee to do as he saw fit. Unfortunately, the young greenhorn cared more about his own masculine image than he did his legal wards. The freedom of the hunt and the buffalo range . . . caused Sky Chief to act rashly, and unfortunately Williamson did not have the maturity to withstand the chiefs harangue.²³²

Williamson had called the Pawnee chief and his sub-chiefs together and offered them his concerns. Sky Chief declared angrily, "These white men are trying to scare us; they want the buffalo for themselves." When the others agreed, he stated further, "If the Sioux come, my young men can run them off," and the hunt continued.

A band of Cut-off Oglala Sioux warriors under Pawnee Killer were encamped on the Stinking Water Creek in what is now Chase County and totaled approximately three hundred.

With them were the Brule Sioux numbering about seven hundred. "On the morning of August 3, six Oglala warriors returned to the Cut-off camp and reported they had come across the Pawnee, about whose presence . . . they had no knowledge." The combined force, now numbering over one thousand warriors, started down the Frenchman valley to meet them in another valley that would afterward be known as Massacre Canyon.²³³

On the morning of August 5th, the Pawnee hunting party moved downstream two miles and turned north up the divide separating the Republican and Frenchman valleys. It was here they fell into the trap set by the Sioux. After sighting buffalo a short distance away the men scattered for the hunt, leaving the women and children unattended as the Sioux attacked.

I noticed a commotion at the head of the procession, which had suddenly stopped. I started to ride up where three of the chiefs were talking, when a boy of sixteen rode up and stopped me. Dismounting, he tied a strip of red flannel to the bridle of my horse, and after remounting told men that the Sioux were coming. What significance was attached to the red flannel on the bridle I was never able to learn.²³⁴

Seeing what was happening, Williamson sought a truce with the Sioux, but they ignored his white flag. When he saw the futility of this move, turned to escape only to have his horse shot out from under him as he reached safety.

By the time a retreat was called, the women and children had run to the safety of the walled canyon, "and the packs of robes, meat, and equipment [which they'd accumulated] were cut from the horses."

As they fled toward the Republican, the Sioux separated to control both sides of the canyon and shot down into the fleeing Pawnee. Many could not escape.²³⁵

In the ensuing blood bath, over sixty Pawnee were killed before the Sioux turned toward their camp on the Stinking Water. Of their number only six were lost.²³⁶

When Royal Buck visited the battlefield several days later, he described in gruesome detail what he saw.

The first thing we met . . . was the loading thrown off their ponies, and this was done within a space of fifty yards, and over this space the ground was literally piled up with packed meat, robes, hides, tents, camp kettles, and . . . everything they carry on their hunting expeditions. Several yards below this scene of confusion the slaughter commenced, and for nearly four miles down the canyon the dead bodies are still lying bleaching in the sun or putrefying in the water or slough holds which are there. In one place is a pond hole two or three yards long where . . . nearly twenty bodies are lying in the most sickening state of decomposition. . . . The retreat of the Pawnees seems to have been in great haste and confusion . . . and in only one place is there any signs of resistance. This was about a mile and a half from the commencement of the retreat; here eight warriors took shelter behind a sort of bank or opening on one side of the canyon, and all of them are lying there in death, a squaw and papoose with them. In fact, their retreat . . . was most fatal to them, as it gave the Sioux free access to them from each bank, shooting down all the time . . .

This can in no sense be called a battle. It was a massacre and nothing more, and near one hundred victims are lying on the ground . . . two thirds are squaws and papooses. All or nearly all are scalped.²³⁷

Defeated by the events which had just taken place, the Pawnee began the long trek back to their reservation at Genoa. Arriving at Culbertson where a party of six were constructing a building, the Indians dismounted some three hundred yards from them. W.Z. Taylor was present that day and later recalled,

Our party . . . formed a line in front of them and laid our guns on the ground, the Indians doing the same. After some time they understood that we wanted them to meet us half way . . . and they proved to be Pawnees. We motioned for them to all come down, and by this time many of the survivors . . . were in sight and in less than an hour about two hundred of them had gathered around us. There were squaws with their papooses strapped to their backs, and old men and young, all crying and pleading for protection,²³⁸ making a pitiful sight indeed.

Continuing down the valley, Williamson led them to Red Willow,²³⁹ where he asked John Byfield for assistance. Byfield's store was in close connection with his home and when Mrs. Byfield, Sarah (Wildman) Leach, an employee, with her children, saw the Indians, they were frightened.

It was supper time and Mrs. Byfield told me to go into the cellar and freeze some ice cream while she prepared the rest of the meal. Soon she came running down [into the] cellar with my children clinging to her hands. The children were crying "They'll kill us, they'll kill us," and Mrs. Byfield told me the place was surrounded by Indians. We did not know what to do but I finally opened the door and looked out. I saw coming toward me a white man,²⁴⁰ which greatly reassured me.

E.S. Hill told a similar story. Unaware of the events which had taken place only hours before, Hill said he had just gotten out of bed the morning they arrived and was sitting in the doorway of his home, putting his boots on.

One boot was on, the other in my hand when I heard a terrible wailing rise from the west. Looking out I saw a strangling company of Indians coming down the trail. A few bucks on ponies were in advance and before I realized what was up, one of the bucks came riding furiously up to the door, his pony's nose nearly hitting my head. I jumped up and with my boot commenced a fight, the Indian hitting me over the head with his bow.²⁴¹

At this point, Williamson interceded and told Hill what had happened. "He drove the Indians away and told me . . . that these were the Pawnees returning to the agency.

Shortly after the Indians left, the Eaton brothers, James N. and Benjamin E.²⁴², who owned land on the Driftwood, arrived in Indianola with a remnant of the battle. She was a Pawnee squaw who had been wounded in the fight and left for dead.²⁴³

On the morning of August 5th, Captain Charles Meinhold and the men under his command were camped at the mouth of Blackwood Creek, just east of Culbertson and knew nothing of the battle until Williamson and three chiefs "crossed over from the south bank of the Republican and came into camp. At about the same time, the first of the retreating Pawnee came into sight."²⁴⁴

William S. Fitch was in Meinhold's camp that morning. On the evening before, three men stopped at his store on the Driftwood to report the Pawnee "crossing the river and going north." Shortly after, a scout traveling with a company of soldiers "came to our ranch and said the Sioux had crossed the Platte" and were coming south. A man staying with Fitch at the time, a Mr. Grep from Illinois, told him of his desire "to see an Indian before he returned [home]" Fitch obliged by taking him to the military camp on the Blackwood the next morning, August 5th.²⁴⁵

Apparently, the two men were in camp when Williamson arrived with news of the battle, although Fitch never acknowledged this fact. "I stayed with the soldiers for about two hours or until they had gone two or three miles up the Republican valley past the Frenchman," leaving the soldiers when they "saw the Pawnees coming down the valley."²⁴⁶

Meinhold's command rode to the battlefield and found two survivors, a wounded squaw with a badly injured baby in a pool of water. Dr. [David Franklin] Powell placed them in a more comfortable spot while the rest of the canyon was toured. When they returned the woman was gone and it appeared she had killed the child, which had fresh wounds on the head.²⁴⁷

Some historians place Fitch at the battlefield with Meinhold on the afternoon of August 5th, that it was he who found the Indian squaw after she left the place prepared her by Dr. Powell, and that it was he who brought her to Indianola. In a letter written in 1925 by W.S.Fitch himself, this was not so. According to him, he visited the canyon on August 6th, with other interests in mind.

A great deal of business conducted at Fitch's trading post included the buying and selling of buffalo hides which, at the time, were valued from seventy five cents to as much as \$2 dollars each.²⁴⁸ When he saw the many spoils of war left there he saw a profit to be made.

The next morning about twenty of the soldiers and myself went up the valley until we reached Massacre Canyon, and there as near as I could count and drive the team I counted 60 dead Indians and the man that . . . was with me counted 63. I picked up four or five Indian saddles . . . also four or five deer hides and all the buffalo hides I could pile on the wagon.²⁴⁹

He also mentions that in coming back down the valley, he found one dead Indian near Rock Canyon, west of present day McCook, and that he buried him among the rocks. He doesn't, however, mention the wounded Indian squaw until later, saying she "stopped at a little sod house near my ranch which the Eaton boys had built."²⁵⁰

This raises another question. If she was as severely wounded as she was, how did she come to arrive at the Eaton soddy, almost twenty miles from Massacre Canyon and south of the river? It may be assumed that she walked the entire distance, but this is unlikely. It may also be assumed that someone brought her here, and if this is so, the name of that person or persons is unknown.

Regardless of how she arrived, the Eaton brothers hitched two cows to a wagon and brought her down the valley to the residence of L.B.Korn, at Indianola.²⁵¹

Prior to her marriage on April 15th, 1865, Sarah E. Madison²⁵² was an employee of the Pawnee Agency in Genoa. Now on the frontier of Red Willow County, she was asked to care for this one Pawnee woman. Whether any of the settlers knew of her work on the Indian reservation is uncertain, but well worth considering. One of the people living in the Driftwood settlement was Calvin R. Baker²⁵³, a qualified physician who could have been of some service. It may be that the Eaton brothers were unaware of his presence in the community. It may also be that the Eatons' knew of Mrs. Korn's work with the Indians and thought this the best place for the dying woman.

Mrs. Korn . . . was the more willing to give shelter and care to the unfortunate woman. There had been some missionary effort among these Indians . . . and this squaw could speak and understand a few words of English. Mrs. Korn also had some knowledge of the Pawnee language, so the two women could communicate to some extent.²⁵⁴

Unwilling to go into her home, Mrs. Korn made an improvised shelter for the Pawnee woman under "a wagon cover near the house." Several neighbors living nearby came to do what they could and Dr. J.S.Shaw, the only physician in the Indianola community, attended to her. She was mortally wounded however, and all they could do was to comfort her. She died some days later.

I owned a mowder box and with this and a few cottonwood boards, [G.A.] Hunter and I made a coffin. Wrapping the squaw in a blanket we placed her in the box. Korn with his mule team carried her to the west bank of Coon Creek where we buried her 255

Thus began the legend of an Indian woman named "Ola" who came here and died in a community that was later named after her. Although there is no connection between the Indian woman and the naming of Indianola, it is a fun story to tell, and why not? No one ever knew her name. When she died, the people gave her the name "Ola," and because she was an Indian, the name Indianola was derived.

In 1975, the citizens of Indianola, wishing to commemorate and honor this young Indian squaw, reinforced the legend by moving her grave from its location on Coon Creek to the city park. Today, visitors may visit the grave site and find the cement marker which says,

PAWNEE SQUAW

Wounded by Indian arrows and left for dead in the battle between the Sioux and Pawnee at Massacre Canyon August 5, 1873. Was found by a hunter, brought to Indianola and left at the home of L.B.Korn where she died a few days later. -- Buried by E.S.Hill, L.B.Korn, and G.A.Hunter. 256